Categories of People

Regarding *'Ilm* (knowledge).

An Article Based Upon Imaam Ibnu Qayyim's

Discussions in his Classical

Miftaahu Daari-s-Sa'aadah

The Key for the Abode of Happiness

Adapted to English

By

Dr. Saleh As-Saleh

May Allah Forgive him, his parents, and all the Muslims

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful,

I begin to write:

Categories of People Regarding *'Ilm* (knowledge).

The Prophet (ﷺ: *sallaAllahu 'aleihi was-sallam*) said, "The example of guidance and knowledge with which Allah has sent me is like abundant rain falling on the earth, some of which was fertile soil that absorbed rain water and brought forth vegetation and grass in abundance. (And) another portion of it was hard and held the rain water and Allah benefited the people with it and they utilized it for drinking, making their animals drink from it and for irrigation of the land for cultivation. (And) a portion of it was barren which could neither hold the water nor bring forth vegetation (then that land gave no benefits). **The first is the example** of the person who comprehends Allah's religion and gets benefit (from the knowledge) which Allah has revealed through me (the Prophetﷺ) and learns and then teaches others. **The last example** is that of a person who does not care for it and does not take Allah's guidance revealed through me (He is like that barren land.)" [Bukhari, Vol. 1, Book 1, Hadeeth 79].

In his commentary on this hadeeth, Imaam Ibnul Qayyim (*rahimahullaah*) concluded in his book (*Muftahu-daris-Sa'aadah*), that the Prophet (ﷺ) categorised people into three types with respect to their acceptance and readiness to memorise, understand and deduct the wisdoms and benefits of knowledge.

The First Category: *Ahlul-hifthi-wal-Faham* (People of Memorization and Understanding).

They are those who memorise, understand the meanings, deduct the aspects of rulings, the wisdoms therein, and the benefits. Their example is like the land which accepts the rain water (memory absorbing knowledge) and brings forth vegetation and grass in abundance. This vegetation and grass is the *fahm* (the understanding) and ability to deduce. This is the example of those who kept what they memorised and understood it. They are the people of texts and understanding.

The Second Category: *Ahlul-hifth* (People of Memorization Only)

Those are able to memorise and relate in precision, but they do not have the ability to understand the meanings, nor to deduct or address the wisdoms and benefits therein.

They are like those who recite the Qur'aan, memorise it, precisely recite and pronounce the letters and hold to the grammar, but without comprehending it.

On the other hand people vary to great extents in terms of their understanding of the texts spoken by Allah and (or) by His Messenger. Some may understand a ruling or two while others may deduce from the same text one hundred or two hundred rulings. The example of these two categories as mentioned in the hadeeth is like the land which has the water. People can benefit from it: drinking, giving it to others to drink, arrogation, and so forth.

These two categories, the first and the second are the happy ones, and the first category is higher in rank. This is the Favour of Allah:

﴿ ذَٰلِكَ فَضْلُ ٱللَّهِ يُؤْتِيهِ مَن يَشَآءُ ۚ وَٱللَّهُ ذُو ٱلْفَضْلِ ٱلْعَظِيمِ ﴾ [الجمعة، ٤]

This is the Grace of Allah, which He bestows on whom He wills. And Allah is the Owner of Mighty Grace. [Qur'aan 62:4].

The Third Category

They are the ones who have no share in memorization nor in understanding. Their similitude in the hadeeth is that of the barren land, which could neither hold the water nor bring forth vegetation. Hence no produce (no benefit), and these are the wicked ones.

The first two categories, those who memorised, learned and understood, and the others who memorised without being able to understand, share the knowledge and teach, each in accordance with the extent he may have received and accepted. The latter knows the wording of the Qur'aan, teaches it and memorises it, while the former knows the wording, the meaning and the ruling and teaches them. The third category has no knowledge nor teaching.

This hadeeth, therefore, makes clear the nobility and rank of knowledge and teaching, and the children of Adam's (*'aleihis-salaam*) categories with respect to this matter. The happy ones and the wicked ones. And in this hadeeth there is evidence that people's need for knowledge is like their need for rain, rather more. And if they fail to find (seek) the knowledge then they are the land that missed the rain. Imam Ahmed (*rahimahullaah*) said: "People are in need of knowledge more than their need for food and drink, because food is needed only once or twice a day, whereas knowledge is needed as much as the number of breaths." This is because each breath needs to be accompanied with faith and wisdom. And if faith and wisdom disassociate from a single breath, then he is ruined. And there is no way to protect against this except by the way of knowledge.

Listen now and contemplate the verse in the Qur'aan, in *soorat ar-Ra'd* (13:17). Allah, the Most High, says:

﴿ أَنزَلَ مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ مَآءً فَسَالَتْ أَوْدِيَةٌۢ بِقَدَرِهَا فَٱحْتَمَلَ ٱلسَّيْلُ زَبَدًا رَّابِيًا ۚ وَمِمَّا يُوقِدُونَ عَلَيْهِ
فِى ٱلنَّارِ ٱبْتِغَآءَ حِلْيَةٍ أَوْ مَتَٰعٍ زَبَدٌ مِّثْلُهُۥ ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ يَضْرِبُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْحَقَّ وَٱلْبَٰطِلَ ۚ فَأَمَّا ٱلزَّبَدُ فَيَذْهَبُ
جُفَآءً ۖ وَأَمَّا مَا يَنفَعُ ٱلنَّاسَ فَيَمْكُثُ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ يَضْرِبُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْأَمْثَالَ ﴿١٧﴾ ﴾

"He sends down water (rain) from the sky, and the valleys flow according to their measure, but the flood bears away the foam that mounts up to the surface, and (also) from that (ore) which they heat in the fire in order to make ornaments or utensils, rises a foam like unto it, thus does Allâh (by parables) show forth truth and falsehood Then, as for the foam it passes away as scum upon the banks, while that which is for the good of mankind remains in the earth. Thus Allâh sets forth parables (for the truth and falsehood, i.e. Belief and disbelief)" (Qur'aan 13:17).

In this *aayah* (verse), Allah gave a similitude for the knowledge which He bestowed upon His Messenger (ﷺ). It is like the rain which He sent down from the sky, because it produces life and benefits mankind in their livelihood, and for the provisions they need in their journey of return to Allah. Then He set the parable of the heart as the valley when He ﷻ said (what means): **"And the valleys flow according to their measure."** A big heart accommodates a lot of the knowledge, like a great valley accommodating a lot of rain, and a small heart accommodates little knowledge like a small valley holding little water. That is why He ﷻ said (what means): **"And the valleys flow according to their measure."** This is parable of the knowledge when it sets or touches the heart. It takes away from the heart the foam (of false doubts), and it carries it to the surface of the heart, like when He ﷻ said (what means): **"The flood bears away the foam that mounts up to the surface."** It does not settle in the valley. Similarly, the false misconceptions when removed by knowledge go to the top surface of the heart where they float and do not settle. Rather they dry out and go away. What settles in the heart is that which benefits it from guidance on truth, as the pure water settles in the valley while the foam washes away.

Then Allah ﷻ set another parable in the same verse:

﴿ وَمِمَّا يُوقِدُونَ عَلَيْهِ فِى ٱلنَّارِ ٱبْتِغَآءَ حِلْيَةٍ أَوْ مَتَٰعٍ زَبَدٌ مِّثْلُهُۥ ﴾ الآية

"And (also) from that (ore) which they heat in the fire in order to make ornaments or utensils, rises a foam like unto it."

This is the ore people use to heat and to melt the gold and silver, copper and iron, in order to take away the impurities contained therein. The impurity is the foam driven out by the fire's heat, and what remains is pure essence. Therefore, in these parables you see two things mentioned:

(i) the rain which is the water, because of the life therein, its cooling and what it produces from benefits,

(ii) the other is fire, which eliminates and burns.

The verses of the Qur'aan bring life to the heart as the rain gives life to the earth, and it burns away the doubts and the lust and its filth, just like the fire burns what falls in it. In addition, the verses distinguish what is good of the essence as compared to falsehood (the foam), just like the fire takes away the impurities from gold, silver, copper and the like.

Then Allah ﷻ said:

﴿ كَذَٰلِكَ يَضۡرِبُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلۡأَمۡثَالَ ﴾ الآية

"Thus Allah sets forth parables
(for the truth and falsehood, i.e. Belief and disbelief)."
[Qur'aan 13:17].

We ask Allah ﷻ to make us of those who know and comprehend, and of those who comply and submit. Aameen.

The slave of Allah,
Saleh As-Saleh

May Allah reward sis *Umm Noor al-Biritaaniyyah al-Yamaniyyah* for transcribing this lecture, and sis *Umm Ahmad al-Kanadiyyah* for her final editing.